

Ch1: The young man ran as fast as the terrain, the sultry night and his labouring breath would allow. His long, flowing strides covered the soft ground underfoot almost as fast as a horse could do over this cold, boggy swampland – a very good thing for him, as his pursuers would certainly be on horseback by now, he imagined. His dark flitting form moved confidently fast – obviously young, strong and fit – eating up the moss-covered ground with his lithe stride and only slowing at all, when a foot sank into a softer portion of the damp, rot-scented earth here.

He didn't – couldn't, take the time look back: he knew that he had to move as far and as fast, as the darkness of the cold Orleans county night allowed. He couldn't think beyond that yet, though he realized he would have to if he wanted to survive through this night of sheer, unadulterated terror. He could hear the dogs – literal hounds from hell, for any runaway - coming on steadily in the wake of his barefoot scent. Still, yet far away sounds to his straining ears, though the faint lament of howls that he heard echoing through the thick, Cotton-woods occasionally, scared him badly and drove him on – literally, running for his suddenly very, very dear life.

Forward and away he went, regardless of obstacles, wild animals, tree-hanging poisonous spiders, snakes and the many more night creatures that he knew, would be out and hunting in the darkness and fog of this dripping, ghostly space. He ran and ran - sweating freely – frequently having to wipe sweat from his eyes to see, even in the cold, winter air here. He went smartly though, revealing a keen, practical mind. Always holding in a reserve of energy, except for the initial - and never used again burst of get-away speed, when he'd run in blind panic. Even then, it was more to gain distance from the Plantation, than any loss of self-control: though Simon understood that it had been out-and-out terror, which drove his feet initially.

He stopped frequently for water while it was available. Much of the sweat he'd lost now soaked the loose, heavy canvass trousers he wore and he knew enough to replace the fluids, or become dizzy and weak: and any weakness here and now, was not an option for survival, he realized only too well. As he ran on, bounding over large tree-roots, around hanging vines - jumping over the small pools of freezing water that lay everywhere throughout the swamplands, he heard a high-pitched scream close to where he passed, cut off in mid-call, as one of those night-hunters struck.

Dodging low-hanging branches, skipping fallen ones and moving deeper into the marsh-lands with each stride, Simon: very recently - good-ole-boy, slave and now, magically-transformed into runaway Nigger, 'in one easy lesson', he thought riotously to himself as he ran - suddenly experienced a strange empathy, with the naïve prey of these merciless night hunters. To the men chasing him, with their bloodthirsty hounds and merciless eyes, he was just that: live prey – something to be hunted down. Taken alive if possible – or, if dead - perhaps only his woolly, black head taken back as proof of his failure to escape. Once they caught a runaway - away out here in the Bayou - it mattered little that the plantation-owner paying them, wanted a live slave returned, if only to demonstrate, the often-fatal punishment to other would-be escapees...